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THOU SHALT NOT KILL

A PEACE PLAY
IN ONE ACT

By MAURICE CAMPBELL

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Thou Shalt Not Kill

A Peace Play

By MAURICE CAMPBELL

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Dedicated to my beloved wife

HENRIETTA CROSMAN CAMPBELL

to whom I am indebted for

the inspiration

CHARACTERS

A Man
A Woman
A Boy
A Soldier
Time—*The present.* Place—*Europe*

SCENE—*A pretty room in a modest cottage—simple, plain, yet with unmistakable peace about. At the two windows in the rear are flower boxes—filled with blossoms. Outside are the green fields and foliage in the distance—peace and quiet everywhere. The sun is shining brightly. In the left center of the stage is a table with rocking-chair of European type at the side. The atmosphere is of European peasantry—yet not poverty. Scattered over the table are the sewing things recently used—stockings to be darned and the little things that denote the thrift and peace of a perfect home. There is a door at the right and one at the left.*

DISCOVERED—*A woman about five and thirty; she is plainly, yet sweetly dressed in grey—she denotes comfortable peasantry. She is softly singing as she waters the plants that are growing in the window boxes in the rear. The door (Right), which leads outside, is partly open, and at this appears an old man—he is carrying a stick; he is a mild-mannered, rather sweet old man. He does not enter further than the door.*

Man

Good morning, my dear.

Woman

Turning partly, but not stopping her work or the humming.

How do you do?

Man

Watering the posies again?

Woman

Of course.

Man

They're a great care to you?

Woman

The greater love and care, the more they live and thrive, like everything else.

Man

I believe you could make an onion bloom like a rose.

Woman

I doubt if I could do that—but, you know, love will accomplish anything.

Man

I'm beginning to believe it—watching you.

Woman

You get your blarney from the Irish.

Man

Not a bit of it—but from the peace and quiet of this house—I believe God must dwell somewhere hereabouts.

Woman

Wherever we are—there God dwells.

Man

That's true for you, my dear.

Woman

It's true for all of us.

Man

Shaking his head, perplexed.

Maybe—maybe—I don't know. Well—God love you anyway, my dear——They're cutting the grain and I must be going—we

must all help with the harvest—and it's a great harvest this year.

Woman

We've much to be thankful for.

Man

I suppose—I suppose——Good-bye, my dear, good-bye.

Woman

Be careful in the sun—it's very warm——Good-bye.

The man exits, and the woman, having been busy with her flowers during the foregoing conversation, has finished with them. She takes up her little song again—humming. She puts away the watering-pot and goes to the table—humming her low, happy song all the time—she sits and takes up the stockings—rocking herself, she begins her work. Suddenly the door (Right) bursts open and in bounds her son, a lad of about sixteen. He is trim—slight and full of life. He has been running and is almost out of breath. He speaks almost with the bursting open of the door.

Boy

Mother——War——it's come——They've declared War.

Woman

My Son——

Boy

We're going to fight.

Woman

No——No——It can't be——it can't be true.

Boy

It is true——word has just come to the village—an officer and some soldiers have arrived and they brought the news.

Woman

War!

Boy

They're reading the lists of reserves now down in the village——won't it be glorious?

Woman

For those who go—or those who sit at home?

Boy

For us—for everybody.

Woman

Come here, my son. (*He crosses.*)
She gets him at her knees.
You don't know what war is.

Boy

Proudly.

I know my father was a soldier.

Woman

And he went away to the last war—and never came back.

Boy

Throwing his arms about her.

Darling mother.

Woman

Did you or I share any of our country's glory when the war was over and I had lost a husband—and you had lost a father?

Boy

Affectionately.

Mother.

Woman

You never knew your father—you don't know what you missed.

Boy

Mother, dear—but he was a hero.

Woman

Yes—he was a hero—and he did his duty and he died. But wouldn't it have been better for all of us if there had been no war—— what did the war do for you——what did the

war do for me? It took away the one who was dear to both of us. Did the sacrifice of all those thousands of husbands and brothers and fathers help you and me? Did it help you and me —or anybody—that the war gave our government another province to grasp in its iron fist?

Boy

But we've got to fight—sometimes—mother, dear.

Woman

God never gave any man the right to kill —and all the laws of civilization proclaim "Thou shalt do no murder."

Boy

But if a man didn't go to war he'd be a coward, mother.

Woman

To-day—yes—but not to-morrow—Thank God. See—suppose you were a man——

Boy

Well, I am—nearly——

Woman

Yes—yes—you soon will be—but suppose you were a man now and you were ordered to go to war—which would be the easier—to go—or to refuse?

She is talking to him now as if he were a little shaver in her arms.

Boy

Why, to go, of course.

Woman

Well that's why men go—it's easier and it's the custom. It takes a braver man to say "No" than "Yes."

Boy

Tapping his breast.

But there's something here, mother, makes me want to go and fight.

Woman

That's the animal in you, my son—that's what you've got to fight—not one another.

Boy

I don't understand.

Woman

Indicating his breast.

What you feel here is in every human breast——it makes men brave——it's that that bids you save a drowning man and it's that that makes the strong protect the weak —but it's that same instinct, turned to savagery, makes you want to fight and kill and maim and thrill at news of war. You want to

fight for your country, my son, but your country doesn't need your strength, except to till the soil and plough the fields——what your country needs now is common sense—not soldiers——That and a few policemen is all any country needs.

Boy

Don't you love your country, mother?

Woman

Love my country——? God—I'd die for it—in the right way—as proudly as any man. But we women bring our children into the world to live for our country—not to die for it——it's peace and happiness brings prosperity—not war.

Boy

But it's war now.

Woman

Yes—it's war now. Because our rulers are jealous of each other, thousands of homes are to be made desolate—thousands of children are to be made fatherless—as you were—and thousands of lives are to be sacrificed—and they call it glorious——Glorious—? It's hideous. They took my husband—they took your father in the last war—I gave him gladly then—but to-day I'd glory in a man who had

the courage to say—"I will not kill my brother."

Boy

Then if they came to take me to the war now, you'd want me to refuse to go? Is that it, mother?

Woman

They won't come for you, my son. *Gathering him in her arms.* Why, you're only a little boy—Thank God.

The faintest tapping of a drum is heard as if in the distance—keeping time to the marching of men. Neither the boy nor the woman hear it.

Boy

What kind of a man was my father, mother?

Woman

The dearest man in all the world——he was tall and fine looking—straight as an arrow—and when he laughed the sun seemed to shine brighter. Before he went away——

Boy

Suddenly the boy hears the beating of the drum, which has gradually become louder, as though approaching. He is alert for a moment and then interrupts.

Listen——!

Instinctively the woman gathers the boy closer into her arms. The beating of the drum becomes louder as it approaches. After a pause—

Listen——!

Another pause, as they listen.

It's the soliders, mother.

He leaps up and runs to the window——looks out.

They're coming this way, mother——do come and see them.

The woman has remained almost immovable ——she seems to sense what is coming——her face is toward the audience. Her back is toward the window, out of which the boy is looking.

Boy

Just see that fine fellow in front, mother—and what a lot of them——I wonder what they think of war?

Suddenly the drum, which has grown quite loud, stops beating as the troops halt.

Why, they're stopping in front of our house —some of them are coming in, mother—— What does it mean? What do they want? Do you think they know father lived here?

The boy leaves the window and goes to his mother. She has risen and stands LEFT. She

clasps him in her arms and gets him to the LEFT of her. Suddenly the door (RIGHT) opens and ENTER a soldier. He is dressed in a non-descript uniform indicative of no particular nation. He sees the woman. He has a paper in his hand. As he enters he looks at the paper.

Soldier

Glancing up.

Frederick Turner live here?

Woman

He's my son.

Soldier

Where is he?

Boy

Coming forward.

My name's Frederick—but I guess you're asking for my father.

Soldier

Where is *he?*

Boy

Disappointed.

Oh, I thought you knew——he went to the last war—long ago——he was killed.

Soldier

So your father was a soldier, too, eh?

Boy

Yes, sir.

Soldier

And he was killed?

Boy

Yes, sir.

Soldier

Well, now it's your turn to go and fight for your country.

Boy

Turning to his mother.

Mother——

Woman

Shielding him in her arms.

Do you mean to say you've come for this boy—this child?

Soldier

He's over fifteen, isn't he?

Woman

He's just sixteen.

Soldier

He's available then——His name's on the list.

Boy

But I don't want to go and fight.

Soldier

Oh, you don't, eh?

Boy

No, sir.

Soldier

What's the matter—are you afraid?

Woman

No—he's not afraid——but he's been taught that it's wrong to kill.

Soldier

And who taught him that?

Woman

I did——his mother.

Soldier

I'm sorry, ma'am, but you see every male citizen over sixteen has been called.

Woman

Well, my son's not going.

Soldier

It's the General's orders, ma'am.

Woman

Well, you go back to your old General and tell him this boy is my son and his mother has got something to say about what he shall do with his life.

Soldier

Who has been trying to protest all this time.

If you will let me say just a word, ma'am?

Woman

Not a word——don't you speak to me——I brought this boy into the world——it was I who suffered—and I'm a good deal more responsible for him than your old General——and he's all I've got and he's mine and I love him.

Soldier

Just a minute, ma'am.

Woman

What do you think God gave him to me for? For you to come along and take him away to be killed?

Soldier

But it's war, ma'am.

Woman

Well, what of that? He had nothing to do with it——He wasn't asked whether he wanted war——it's not right——it's not just for one human being to plunge a whole nation into war and then sit back and watch the slaughter of the innocents——I'm not a coward——I could die for my country as well as any man—and I could send that child to his death, too, if it would do my country any good——but war's not right——We can pray to God all

we like to help us, but God never helped one man to kill another and He's not going to help now——my boy's not a coward——he's his father's son——and he was a soldier——he went away to the last war and he never came back——and now you want to take this boy ——I tell you you sha'n't do it——you sha'n't do it.

Soldier

I'm sorry, ma'am, but if he goes, he's got a chance to live——if he stays, he's got no chance at all.

Woman

What do you mean?

Soldier

I've got to take him—dead or alive.

Woman

You mean——you'd kill him——here——now?

Soldier

I'd have to.

Woman

And would you do that?

Soldier

Yes.

Woman

God——what a country.

Soldier

Ready to start for the door.

Come——is it yes or no, before I call my men?

Woman

As the boy comes to her she takes him in her arms.

My little boy.

Boy

Mother, dear, I won't go.

Soldier

Starting for the door.

Very well, then.

Woman

Breaking away from the boy and stopping soldier at Door. RIGHT.

Wait——wait——He didn't mean it——he didn't mean it——It's my fault——I taught him—I thought it was right——you see I'm his mother and I love him——I did so want him to live in peace and grow up to be a man—but that dream's gone now—there's been a blight put upon the land——it's war—and we women have got to suffer.

Soldier

You make it awful hard for me, ma'am. Do you think I like this work? Going about tearing away husbands and sons and sweethearts? Do you think those men out there have any fondness for war? Not a bit of it—most of them don't even know what this war's about—but they've all got families that they've had to leave—and they love them just as much as you love your son. I've got a wife and baby, too—the last sight I had of them, he was nursing at his mother's breast ——I said good-bye to them yesterday—— and somehow—I never expect to see them again——you'll forgive me, ma'am, I know when you understand how it is with all of us.

Woman

Taking his hand.

I'm sorry—I didn't understand. I was selfish.

Boy

Interrupting, coming to his mother.

Mother, I do so want to go.

Woman

You want to go?

Boy

Yes.

Woman

Then go, my son, and bear your burden with the rest.

Boy

To soldier—

You hear—I'm to go.

Soldier

And we'll make a soldier of you.

Woman

God help me. God help me.

Boy

Returning to woman.

But how about you, mother——what'll you do?

Woman

Attempting to smile.

I'm all right, son——see—I can smile—it will soon be over and when you come back we'll all go and see the Captain's baby.

Soldier

That we will—sure enough.

Woman

Watch over him—he's only a child—and remember he's all I have left——I'd do as much for your son.

Soldier

Shaking her hand.

God bless you, ma'am—and good-bye.

Woman

Good-bye.

Soldier

Come on, son—hurry up.

Boy

Good-bye, mother.

She takes him in her arms.

Woman

Good-bye, my son—He shall give His angels charge over thee.

Boy

Mother.

Woman

Kissing him.

My little boy.

Woman

Releasing him and holding him at arm's length.

Now—you're a man——

She slaps him on the shoulder.

You're a soldier.

He faces about to soldier.

March!

The Boy marches toward Door Right and Exits with Soldier.

Boy

Calling from the outside.

Good-bye, mother.

Woman

Good-bye, son.

Immediately the drum begins to beat to the time of the troops as they march away—the band begins to play a lively march and rows of bayonets show above the sills of the two windows at the rear as though the troops were marching past. The woman stands immovable—then all her pent-up passion breaks forth.

Curse them——curse them——God curse them——they've taken my son——they've sent him to war—curse of the world——I didn't want him to go——curse you, bring him back—he's mine—he's mine——

The curtain descends in the midst of this tirade with the band playing and the bayonets of the soldiers passing the windows in the rear.

CURTAIN

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